

BOOK REVIEW

THE AI-SAVVY LEADER: NINE WAYS TO TAKE BACK CONTROL AND MAKE AI WORK

Author: David De Cremer
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OVERVIEW

As AI rapidly advances, it is sparking global debates across industries. In business, two key challenges have emerged: leaders face pressure to adopt AI for innovation and competitiveness, while employees fear job loss due to automation. These strategic and existential concerns define a central dilemma for modern organizations. Therefore, one of the top 50 highly recommended books by Harvard Business Review, *The AI-Savvy Leader: Nine Ways to Take Back Control and Make AI Work* by David De Cremer is a timely and necessary guide to address these two tensions. As AI technologies increasingly shape strategic decisions, organizational operations, and workforce dynamics, the need for informed, responsible, and visionary leadership becomes critical (Davenport & Ronanki, 2018).

David De Cremer is widely recognized as a global authority at the intersection of AI and management. Among his many notable roles, he is the founder of the Centre on AI Technology for Humankind in Singapore, which was ranked 4th in digital competitiveness according to the 2022 IMD world ranking. He is a professor of management at the NUS Business School, and a member of Ernst & Young's Global AI Advisory Board. He has also been named one of the world's top 30 management thinkers and is the author of multiple acclaimed books. His previous book titled "Leadership by Algorithm: Who Leads and Who Follows in the AI Era?" is a report of his prolific research; *Leadership by Algorithm* became a bestseller on Amazon. In his new book, he offers a profound insightful set of 9 strategies for business leaders to reassert their role through AI transformation. Rather than centering on technical dimensions or machine learning mechanics, the book highlights human-centered leadership skills, e.g., vision, communication, and strategic implementation, reshaping them within scenarios of AI use. De Cremer points out a convincing case that these enduring leadership competencies are suitable and important in organizations navigating the way to more responsible and sustainable AI applications.

Currently the Dunton Family Dean at Northeastern University's D'Amore-McKim School of Business, De Cremer brings in-depth academic expertise and real-world perspectives, experienced from enduring years of working with worldwide organizations and institutions. With *The AI-Savvy Leader*, De Cremer maintains this trajectory, making a call for

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business leaders to actively understand AI's influences and to use it for the benefit of both companies and society.

REVIEW

This book provides a profound and comprehensive analysis of leadership in the world of artificial intelligence. With a detailed narrative, the author features the difficulties and opportunities generated by AI's influence on business leaders in different industries. The contribution of the work excels in its actionable strategies, highlighting core leadership skills rather than technical expertise, with clear articulation of nine key leadership actions which can guide successful AI adoption.

The author begins by demystifying AI for executives who may feel overwhelmed by the technology, demonstrating through relatable instances, e.g., the story of George, how leaders can reclaim their influence and drive AI integration effectively. Rather than centering on algorithms or data science, the book delves into emotional intelligence, trust-building, and authentic communication, skills crucial to navigating the human side of AI transformation.

Essentially, the book challenges the predominant narrative that AI will transform and leave traditional leadership outdated. In contrast, it addresses that while AI technologies advance fast, the foundational human need for empathetic, knowledgeable, and participative leadership remains stable. The author convincingly claims that leaders must invest greater time and effort into understanding their leadership roles in order to effectively guide their organizations through the inevitable AI-driven shift.

The real-world suggestions used to foster trust, embrace vulnerability, and thoroughly discuss AI applications, are comprehensive and effective. By viewing AI as a supportive tool rather than as a challenge, the book aims to provide leaders with the confidence and acceptance to steer their teams, limiting resistance and mistrust.

Chapter 8 highlights employees' fears of being replaced by AI, emphasizing job enrichment over automation. The author urges leaders to apply AI to eliminate repetitive tasks, allowing employees to focus on meaningful, creative work. AI should enhance human potential, advocating for a future where humans and AI work together.

Throughout the book, the author offers a promising yet actionable approach for executives aiming to guide their organizations through the significant influences of AI. It is an insightful material for business leaders who aim to preserve their relevance and efficiency in a fast-changing technological world. This work motivates leaders to maintain their exceptional human strengths and to steer with authenticity, empathy, and tactical vision in the world of AI.

In essence, the book argues that in the age of AI, business leaders cannot afford to sit back and let technology teams guide digital transformation alone. De Cremer challenges the common misconception that AI adoption is purely a technical issue, reserved for engineers or IT specialists. Instead, he claims that executives and managers must take a primary role in driving AI integration, highlighting that the technology can be aligned with organizational values, goals, and human potential. While technical teams offer important support and training on AI tools, it is the responsibility of leadership to make strategic decisions, set ethical boundaries, and foster a culture that uses AI to augment, not replace, human capabilities. De Cremer argues, leadership is more critical than ever in an AI-driven world, as companies must carefully balance innovation with empathy, efficiency with creativity, and automation with human judgment.

To support his argument, De Cremer draws from his nearly two decades of extensive experience. The book is structured around nine leadership strategies, including (1) Learning AI as a leader, (2) Purpose to guide questions, (3) Inclusion for human-AI collaboration, (4) Communication to drive adoption, (5) Vision for innovative AI use, (6) Balance among

stakeholders, (7) Empathy in AI adoption, (8) Mission to augment jobs, not automate, and (9) Emotional Intelligence as the new hard skill. These are not just presented conceptually, but are backed by a combination of participatory observations, practical business interactions, and survey data. For example, De Cremer carried out a survey in Singapore, showcasing that 68% of managers felt their organizations were ineffective in utilizing their AI systems, reinforcing his point that leadership, not just technology, is the missing link in many failed AI transitions (Ng, 2022). The book's approach is rich with perspectives from the author's own direct engagement with executives, providing both authority and real-world relevance.

CONCLUSION

Overall, the book provides a comprehensive and real-world resource for business leaders dealing with the difficulties of AI application. Its key content, that successful AI adoption relies on technical expertise and strong leadership skills, emotional intelligence, trust-building, and authentic communication, is thoroughly expressed among the various sections. By integrating actionable instances, thoughtful perspectives, and real-world approaches, the author maintains reader interest while discussing the human and organizational dynamics of AI-driven transformation. Although the focus is on leadership within larger organizations, with little communication relating to smaller or non-traditional working settings, the book efficiently emphasizes how enduring leadership qualities remain important in a growing AI-saturated business setting. The book targets the business leaders, CEOs, managers, and decision-makers, responsible for guiding AI adoption in organizations. It's also valuable for business faculty and students studying leadership and strategy in AI-driven change. Hence, the book is not for readers seeking technical deep dives into algorithms, coding, or machine learning models. Lastly, let me end this review with a direct quote from this powerful book to help you realize the AI era is here; we are already beyond the point where someone could choose to bypass or ignore it: "...when ChatGPT was released on November 30, 2022, it instantly became a global phenomenon. Two months after its debut, this LLM application had more than thirty million users and was getting about five million visits a day..." (cited in Conclusion section of the book with reference to Roose, 2023).

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